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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO SYLHET DIVISION WITH SENIOR GOB
OFFICIALS HIGHLIGHTS U.S. ASSISTANCE AND ENHANCES COOPERATION

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Ambassador and USAID Mission Director visited USG-supported development assistance project sites in Sylhet Division August 2-5 to highlight U.S. support in health and environment and enhanced U.S.-Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and intra-GOB cooperation. They attended the inauguration of a health clinic, a Family Welfare Center, Chevron's Bibiyana Gas Fields, and the Lawachara National Park, meeting local political and business leaders as well as American citizens residing in the northeastern region. The Minister of Health and Welfare, Minister of Forestry, Chief Whip of Parliament and local Members of Parliament joined in the visit. The U.S. is making a difference in Sylhet, the lowest performing district in most socio-economic indicators in all of Bangladesh.

PROMOTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

¶2. (SBU) On August 2, the Ambassador spoke to 100 representatives of the Sylhet businesses community, educators, and civil society members at a reception hosted by the Sylhet Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Ambassador emphasized the need for developed and less-developed countries to work together to deal with the worldwide recession and lauded Bangladesh for its progress in trade and business. He supported the notion of a Sylhet special economic zone to draw more foreign investment and create a sustainable business environment for economic development. The event received wide coverage in both local and national media the following day.

SUPPORTING COOPERATION AMONG POLITICAL PARTIES

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador hosted a dinner for local political party leaders, including representatives from civil society, the press, Sylhet City Mayor Badruddin Ahmed Kamran as well as members of parliament. He hailed the cooperative relationship between ruling and opposition parties in Sylhet as an example for other parts of the country of how leaders of rival parties can work together to resolve local issues. The Ambassador remarked on the hard-working character of Sylhetis, noting that remittances from Sylheti expatriates in United Kingdom and United States have driven the region's economic growth. The event spurred dialogue among a broad cross section of Sylhet's political leaders and parties.

REACHING OUT TO AMERICAN CITIZENS

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador, on August 3, held a breakfast meeting for American Citizens residing in the Sylhet region. The informal setting provided an opportunity for American citizens to discuss a wide range of consular and non-consular issues directly with the Ambassador and U.S. Mission Dhaka officers.

SUPPORTING GOB FAMILY WELFARE PROGRAM

15. (SBU) The Ambassador and USAID Director, accompanied by senior GOB health officials, visited the Doyamir Government Family Welfare Center. Mohammad Abdul Qayyum, Director General for Family Planning; Jabunnessa Hoque, Member of Parliament from Sylhet; Shafiqur Rahman Chowdury, Member of Parliament from Belaganj and Biswanath constituency; and senior health and family planning officials from the Sylhet Division also attended. The Doyamir union clinic, the local level GOB health care provider, serves a population of 30,000. Clinic managers outlined clinic operations during a tour of the facility. The tour was followed by a ceremony where the Ambassador and the Minister of Health planted trees outside the clinic.

AMERICAN CORNER, SYLHET INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

16. (SBU) Mrs. Moriarty addressed approximately 70 students and faculty at the American Corner at Sylhet International University. The presentation, "The Role of Students in a Democracy," arranged through a local NGO, stimulated many questions from students about political action, nonviolence, and the role of women, comparing the American and Bangladeshi experiences. Mrs. Moriarty met with the Vice Chancellor, President, and Dean of Sylhet International University, and reviewed books and videos available at the Sylhet American corner, provided and supported by U.S. Mission Dhaka.

U.S. MISSION AND CHEVRON LAUNCH NEW SMILING SUN CLINIC

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17. (SBU) The Ambassador and USAID Director launched a Smiling Sun Clinic in Habiganj. Minister of Health A.F.M. Ruhul Haque, led the GOB delegation, joined by Chevron Bangladesh President Steve Wilson and local Members of Parliament and commissioners. The clinic - the 320th Smiling Sun clinic in Bangladesh - provides basic health care and maternal services including family planning, obstetrical care, and medications to those living in the area. The launch ceremony included speeches, a ribbon cutting and plaque unveiling, and tree plantings. The Minister of Health, Ambassador and Mission Director each administered oral medication to infants in the clinic. (Note: The baby fed by the Ambassador cried lustily in protest from the cameras.) The clinic building and operations were funded by Chevron and a joint public private alliance.

LAUNCHING U.S. SAFE MOTHERHOOD PROJECT MAMONI

18. (SBU) The Ambassador took the opportunity to announce the U.S. Government's new health initiative, "MaMoni", Bangla endearment for mother. The USD 13.5 million program will address high death rates among pregnant women and newborns; improve outreach to women in remote areas; and increase awareness and education to promote safe delivery and improve family planning. Mrs. Moriarty visited Panicherra village to observe the ACCESS Safe Motherhood and Neonatal Health Care project. She met with the local Community Action Group (CAG), men who meet monthly to learn anatomy, physiology, basic ante-natal care, nutrition, breastfeeding, and advance planning for emergency transport. Mrs. Moriarty also observed a home counseling session by an ACCESS field worker for pregnant women; simple, low cost newborn care techniques including how to wrap and dry an infant; and umbilical cord care. Despite initial concerns that the community would not accept advice on maternal health and family planning from young unmarried women, field workers have gained community trust and confidence by exhibiting skill in saving the lives of newborns.

CHEVRON'S BIBIYANA GAS FIELD

19. (SBU) The Ambassador and USAID visited the Chevron operated Bibiyana Gas Field which now provides 1/3rd of Bangladesh's daily

gas consumption. Chevron Bangladesh has been active in oil and gas exploration and production in Bangladesh currently extracts gas from three fields. The Bibiyana Natural Gas Field was discovered in 1998. The Ambassador praised Chevron's safety efforts: the Bibiyana campus recently reported employees had logged 8.8 million man-hours without any days-away-from-work. USG staff also received a guided tour of the facilities.

LAWACHARA INTEGRATED PROTECTED AREA
CO-MANAGEMENT PROJECT

10. (SBU) The Ambassador and USAID Director joined a consultative meeting attended by more than 100 participants, including the Chief Whip of the Bangladesh Parliament, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment and Forest, the Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forest, members of local administration, government and law enforcement agencies, and community representatives. The Ambassador highlighted the gathering as an example of effective grassroots democracy focused on resolving crucial natural resource issues. Over the past year, USAID has funded a number of Integrated Protected Area Co-Management Project (IPAC) interventions designed to address the pressures and threats to conservation in Lawachara National Park. The Ambassador observed and inaugurated a number of IPAC projects, including the Community Owned Nature Interpretation Center (CONIC). The Ambassador also met with members of women's livelihood groups formed by IPAC to discuss the context and challenges for Park conservation. The women's groups represented both Bengali and indigenous communities.

COMMENT

11. (SBU) The visit highlighted the depth of U.S. engagement in Sylhet, showcasing models of community based development assistance programs in health and the environment. Senior GOB officials who accompanied the Ambassador and USAID Director learned how U.S. assistance dollars are supporting Bangladesh in these two sectors. The GOB officials' participation and engagement also fostered more effective intra-GOB coordination. The Ambassador's interaction with local political and business leaders and American Citizens residing in northeastern Sylhet division, which garnered extensive media coverage, increased the U.S. reach in Bangladesh.

MORIARTY